ADJUSTABLE PEDAL ASSEMBLY

TECHNICAL FIELD

The present invention concerns an adjustable pedal assembly for a vehicle including a mounting arrangement for attaching the pedal assembly to a vehicle structure where a plurality of pedals are arranged pivotally relative to the mounting arrangement and are arranged pivotally relative to an adjustment element, with the pedals pivoting about one axis and the adjustment element pivoting about another axis.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Conventional automotive technology has provided an adjustable driver's seat to accommodate drivers of various heights. Typically, seat adjusters can move the seat in various directions including up and down, fore and aft, and/or tilting the seat relative to the vehicle. This allows the driver to move closer to or farther away from vehicle control pedals. Another option used in the automotive industry to accommodate drivers having different heights, is to provide the vehicle with an adjustable steering wheel. The steering wheel is typically adjustable in a longitudinal direction in relation to the vehicle and can usually be adjusted vertically.

Despite the great adjustment possibilities that exist with these two different options, it is not always possible to find an optimal driving position if the mounting of the vehicle control pedals is fixed within the vehicle. A third option is to have vehicle control pedals that are selectively adjustable to accommodate drivers having different heights. One such adjustable pedal assembly is described in U.S. Patent No. 4,870,871. The adjustable pedal assembly in this patent involves fastening the pedals along threaded shafts, whereby the pedals can be shifted horizontally toward or away from the vehicle driver through rotation of the shafts. This construction is complicated and expensive. Additionally, if the vehicle collides with another object, some of the pedal components in this design may come into contact with the driver, which is undesirable.

For an adjustable pedal assembly to operate well in practice, it is not sufficient that the pedals merely be shiftable toward and away from the driver. In positions where the pedals are far away, i.e., at a long distance from the driver, it is necessary that pedal pads be orientated in a more vertical position than is the case when the

pedals are closer to the driver. A shorter driver, who moves the driver's seat closer to the steering wheel and higher up, will maneuver the pedals more from above than is the case with a tall driver who lowers the driver's seat and moves it away from the steering wheel.

Thus, it would be desirable to provide an adjustable pedal assembly that includes horizontal adjustment, i.e., adjustment in fore and aft directions with respect to the vehicle, and which includes angular adjustment of the pedal pads so that the pads can be angled upwardly when the pedals are closer to the driver. It is important that this pedal assembly include a drive arrangement for selectively adjusting pedal position that can be easily integrated in the vehicle. It is also desirable for the adjustable pedal assembly to to be designed such that if the vehicle is in a collision, the pedal components will not come into contact with the driver. Finally, the adjustable pedal assembly should be simpler in design and less expensive than prior art pedal assemblies.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION AND ADVANTAGES

An adjustable pedal assembly includes a mounting arrangement for attachment to a vehicle structure and at least one pedal pivotally supported with respect to the mounting structure. The pedal pivots about a first pivot axis. An adjustment element is pivotally supported with respect to the mounting structure and defines a second pivot axis. The adjustment element selectively moves the pedal between a plurality of operable positions. The assembly is characterized by the pedal being pivotally supported with respect to the adjustment element wherein the second pivot axis is generally parallel to the first pivot axis.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Other advantages of the present invention will be readily appreciated as the same becomes better understood by reference to the following detailed description when considered in connection with the accompanying drawings wherein:

Figure 1 is a perspective view of the subject adjustable pedal assembly;

Figure 2 is a front view of the adjustable pedal assembly shown in Figure 1; and

Figure 3 is a side view of the adjustable pedal assembly shown in Figure 1.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

Referring to the Figures, wherein like numerals indicate like or corresponding parts throughout the several views, an adjustable pedal assembly is shown in Figure 1. The invention will be described below using directional and positional indications. These indications concern the conditions that prevail when the object of the invention is mounted in a vehicle. Thus, indications such as "left," "right," "forward (fore direction)," "rearward (aft direction)," etc. in the application concern corresponding indications as normally used in connection with a vehicle and should not be considered limiting.

In Figure 1, reference number **1** generally concerns a mounting arrangement by which the adjustable pedal assembly is mounted to a vehicle structure **37**. The mounting arrangement **1** is designed and situated to provide a securing of the pedal assembly in a special supporting bar that is separate from a vehicle cowl so that the pedal assembly is not affected by such movements that the cowl might make during a collision. The mounting arrangement **1** which thus will be designated as stationary relative to the vehicle, is comprised of a first fastening element **2** and a second fastening element **3** with fastening points **23** and **24** as well as **25** and **26**, respectively. The two (2) fastening elements **2** and **3** have supports that define a pivot axis **4**. Any type of fasteners known in the art can be used to fasten the fastening elements **2**, **3** to the vehicle structure **37** at fastening points **23, 24, 25, 26.**

The object of the invention also includes an adjustment element that is generally designated by **5**. The adjustment element **5** is connected to the mounting arrangement **1** and is pivotal relative to the mounting arrangement about the pivot axis **4**.

The adjustment element **5** serves to fasten and support a plurality of pedals **6, 7, 8** which are supported by the mounting arrangement **1**. Each of the pedals **6, 7, 8** is connected to an actuator that is used to control a vehicle system. This will be discussed in greater detail below.

Preferably, pedal **8** is a clutch pedal used to activate a clutch mechanism for shifting gears within a vehicle. Pedal **7** is preferably a brake pedal used to activate a vehicle braking system and pedal **6** is preferably an accelerator pedal used to activate an engine throttle. While three (3) pedals **6, 7, 8** are shown, it should be understood that the adjustable pedal assembly could include more or less pedals. Each of the pedals **6, 7, 8** extends downwardly from the adjustment element **5** and

terminates at a pedal pad **30, 31, 32**, respectively. The pedal pads **30, 31, 32** are attached to free ends of the pedals **6, 7, 8** and are adapted to receive the driver's foot.

The pedals **6, 7, 8** are pivotally supported in the adjustment element **5** and are pivotal around a common pivot axis **9**, which is shown in Figure 1. The two (2) pivot axes **4** and **9** are essentially parallel to each other, and are approximately horizontal and crosswise relative to the longitudinal direction of the vehicle.

As an alternative to the common pivot axis **9** for the three (3) pedals **6, 7, 8**, it is possible that each of the pedals **6, 7, 8** could be suspended around two or possibly three pivot axes separated from each other. In this embodiment also, the pivot axes are approximately parallel to each other, and are generally horizontal and orientated crosswise relative to the longitudinal direction of the vehicle.

It is evident from the view in Figure 3, which shows the adjustable pedal assembly from the side, that the pivot axis **9** for the pedals **6, 7, 8** is located beneath and in front of the pivot axis **4** for the adjustment element **5**. Because the pedals **6, 7, 8** in the unactuated state are spring-tensioned to stop positions in the clockwise direction around the pivot axis **9**, it is evident that with the pivoting of the adjustment element **5** around the pivot axis **4**, the adjustment element **5** and the pedals **6, 7, 8** suspended on the adjustment element **5** will move as a rigid unit.

Figure 3 shows the pedals **6, 7, 8** with solid lines in the unactuated state and in an initial position before such a pivoting and with dashed lines in the unactuated stated after such a pivoting. In other words, the solid lines show the position of the pedals **6, 7, 8** at their furthest position from the driver before they are pivoted as a unit about pivot axis **4** and the dashed lines show the position of the pedals **6, 7, 8** after they have been pivoted as a unit about pivot axis **4** and where the pedals **6, 7, 8** are in their closest position to the driver. It is evident from Figure 3 that as the pedals **6, 7, 8** were pivoted about pivot axis **4**, the pedal pads **30, 31, 32** were shifted rearwardly in the longitudinal direction of the vehicle to a considerable extent. Additionally, as the pedals **6, 7, 8** were pivoted about pivot axis **4**, the pedal pads **30, 31, 32** were angled upwardly at an angle that is as great as the angle of rotation for the adjustment element **5** around the pivot axis **4**. The pedal pads **30, 31, 32** are also lifted to a higher level.

In the example shown, the longitudinal shift of the pedal pads can be up to 100 mm with a pivot angle of about 18° around the pivot axis **4** at the same time as the pedal pads **30, 31, 32** are lifted about 20 mm. A corresponding angling up of the

pedal pads **30, 31, 32** is also effected. The position of the pivot axis **9** of the pedals **6, 7, 8** in the example illustrated means that in the initial position according to the drawing, an angle is formed between a vertical line **34** through the pivot axis **4** and a connecting line **35** between the pivot axis **4** and the pivot axis **9** of approximately 35°. It should be understood that the numerical quantities for the horizontal, vertical, and angular adjustments discussed above, are exemplary in nature and are not limiting.

A driving mechanism is used to selectively move the adjustment element **5** about the pivot axis **4**. In the fastening element **2** of the mounting arrangement **1**, shown in Figure 2, a stator element **10** is attached to an angular gear assembly that can be selectively driven under the effect of an electric drive motor **11**. The angular gear assembly has a rotor element **12** that rotates with respect to the stator **10**, seen in Figure 1, and which is supported on the fastening element **2** to drive the adjustment element **5**. Thus, with the rotation of the rotor element **12**, the adjustment element **5** will follow the movement and hence pivot about the pivot axis **4**.

The angular gear assembly is designed as a planetary gear that is self-braking and designed to handle very large rotational torques on the order of 1000 Nm (Newton-meters) or more. Thus, no locking element is required for locking the adjustment element **5** in the selected adjustment position. The gear assembly is also extremely compact in its outer dimensions which improves packaging.

As an alternative to the angular gear, a linear adjusting device can be coupled to a connecting element **15** that extends between fastening element **2** and fastening element **3**, and which is located at a distance from the pivot axis **4**. Optionally the linear adjusting device can be connected to an element that is non-rotationally connected to the connecting element **15**.

To summarize, the the pedals **6, 7, 8** in the adjustable pedal assembly are pivotally supported with respect to the adjustment element **5** wherein the second pivot axis **4** is generally parallel to the first pivot axis **9**. The driving mechanism with the electric motor **11** and gear assembly **12** is used to selectively rotate the adjustment element **5** about the second pivot axis **4**. The pedals **6, 7, 8** are pivotally mounted within the adjustment element **5** to pivot about the first pivot axis **9**, thus the position of the first pivot axis **9** moves with respect to the second pivot axis **4** when the adjustment element **5** is rotated.

The adjustment element **5** has two (2) opposite fastening ears **13 and 14**, one on each side of the connecting element **15**. One fastening ear **13** is connected to the rotor element **12** of the angular gear assembly. The other fastening ear **14** has an articulated connection with fastening element **3** so that the adjustment element **5** becomes pivotal around the above pivot axis **4**. The connecting element **15** extends horizontally between the two (2) fastening ears **13, 14**.

Fastening ear **13** on the adjustment element **5** extends forwardly from the rotor element **12** and serves to support a pivot pin **16**, shown in Figure 2. The pivot pin **16** rotatably supports the clutch **8** and brake **7** pedals and extends longitudinally along pivot axis **9** such that the pedals **7, 8** rotate about pivot axis **9**.

The clutch pedal **8** is connected to an actuator that controls the vehicle clutch. The actuator includes a forward-directed arm **17** that is attached to the adjustment element **5**, and which serves to fasten a maneuvering device **18** in the form of a piston/cylinder unit that is to be actuated by the clutch pedal **8**. The maneuvering device **18** is connected to a freewheel clutch of the vehicle via a tube that is designated by **19**. The tube **19** is readily bendable and deformable such that it cannot transfer any movements to the pedal assembly or components of the pedal assembly in the case of a vehicle collision. Thus, when the tube **19** experiences a load level that exceeds a predetermined limit, such as when the vehicle collides with another object, the tube **19** will bend and will prevent the clutch pedal **8** from contacting the driver.

The accelerator pedal **6** is connected to an actuator that controls the vehicle engine throttle. The accelerator pedal **6** is preferably connected to an electric control potentiometer **36**, shown schematically in Figure 2. The potentiometer **36** is fastened in the adjustment element **5** and which emits an electric signal that is dependent on the position of the accelerator pedal **6** around the pivot axis **9**. The potentiometer **36** is connected to the engine of the vehicle via electric lines. While an electronic throttle control configuration is preferred, the subject adjustable pedal assembly could be used in standard push-pull cable operated configurations.

The brake pedal **7** is connected to an actuator that controls the vehicle braking system. The brake pedal **7** has an arm **20** directed upwardly, which can be seen as an extension of the pedal arm **7** past the pivot axis **9**. The upwardly directed arm **20** has a recess **21** in which a drag link **22** is fastened. The opposite (front) end of the drag link **22** is connected to a brake servo located in the vehicle. By application of

the upwardly directed arm **20** the brake pedal **7** will be swung forward (away from the driver) if the drag link **22** should be shifted rearwardly (toward the driver) during a vehicle collision. This will prevent the brake pedal **7** from coming into contact with the driver during a vehicle collision.

To make the brake function independent of the pivoting of the adjustment element **5** around the pivot axis **4**, the drag link **22** is located in the forward end position of the pedals **6, 7, 8** over a connection line between the pivot axis **4** and the forward fastening of the drag link **22** in the brake servo. With a counter-clockwise pivoting of the adjustment element, as seen in Figure 3, such that the pedals **6, 7, 8** are shifted rearwardly in the vehicle, the drag link will pass down on the underside of the connection line. Suitably, the drag link **22** is located symmetrically around the connection line in the two extreme positions of the pedals **6, 7, 8**.

The maneuvering device designed as a piston/cylinder unit **18** for the clutch pedal **8** can be omitted and replaced with an arrangement of the type described above in connection with the brake pedal **7**. It is also conceivable to use a hydraulic transfer with the brake pedal **7** of the type describe in connection with the clutch pedal **8**. With regard to the accelerator pedal **6**, a mechanical connection such as a wire or cable, can be used as an alternative to the electrical transfer described above.

The invention has been described in an illustrative manner, and it is to be understood that the terminology which has been used is intended to be in the nature of words of description rather than of limitation.

Obviously, many modifications and variations of the present invention are possible in light of the above teachings. It is, therefore, to be understood that within the scope of the appended claims, wherein reference numerals are merely for convenience and are not to be in any way limiting, the invention may be practiced otherwise than as specifically described.